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The Daily 202

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Charles Koch wants a more open border.

Immigration is one reason he’s backed away from the GOP.

Charles Koch speaks at the Koch donor network seminar in Indian Wells, Calif., in January. (Seminar Network)

BY JAMES HOHMANN
with Joanie Greve and Mariana Alfaro

THE BIG IDEA: Charles Koch doesn’t just think President Trump’s threat to close the southern

border is terrible. He'd do the opposite.

"I would let everybody in who comes here to contribute, and no one who wants to come here to do harm, and see how easy this is," the billionaire industrialist said on Monday in Redwood City, Calif. "This goes to our whole philosophy of openness. … We have to have an open society – open to ideas, people, goods and services – to learn from each other and have us all benefit."

During rare public comments, the Koch brother complained that leaders in both parties agree that the immigration laws need to change. "But they think it will help the other party more, so they won't do it," he said. "And we can't make any progress on policies that a great majority of the American people – and even the majority of the politicians – agree would be the right thing to do."

In response to a direct question about Trump, Koch said: "My deal is to hate the sin, not the sinner. We want to help save the sinner, right?"

Forbes estimates that Koch is worth $51.5 billion, making him the 11th richest person in the world. The network he leads declined to support Trump in 2016 and plans to again stay out of the presidential race in 2020. But the constellation of groups that Koch and his friends support have played a prominent role in shaping the 2017 tax cuts, relaxing regulations on corporations, advancing

business-friendly judges and, most notably, overhauling the criminal justice system.

Koch said Mitt Romney's failure in 2012 is another factor behind his decision not to play in the presidential. "In the 55 years I've been involved in these activities, we've only supported one presidential candidate, and that was Mitt Romney," he said during an hour-long Q&A at the Global Philanthropy Forum's annual conference. "And that's because he did so many things in his private life to help people, and then he didn't campaign very well. He didn't campaign on these values that we think he held. He had some bad campaign advice – or something."

The 83-year-old concluded in recent years that Republican congressional leaders were taking his support for granted by assuming that his groups would be with them no matter what. In the 2018 election cycle, the network said it still spent between $300 million to $400 million on politics and policy. But strategists declined to run ads or mobilize their grass-roots organizations to support certain Republicans who they thought would be unreliable on the issues that the donors care about most, such as now-Sen. Kevin Cramer (R-N.D.).

Groups backed by Koch still expect to spend on behalf of down-ballot candidates in 2020 for House, Senate and

governor, but officials have declined to share an estimate – which they did in years past.

Koch said he's taking a longer-term view toward politics because that's what made him so successful in business. Koch Industries, based in Wichita, is privately held, so he doesn't need to worry about quarterly profits or how the Wall Street investors will react to a strategy that may take years to pay dividends. He said that many chief executives at public companies routinely fall prey to the same kind of short-term, self-defeating thinking that afflicts politicians.

"When you get in politics, it's short-term," Koch explained. "It's about the next election. So you elect some people, and you think that they're good at it, and then there are all sorts of perverse secondary consequences from that."

Koch complained that the federal government has grown under presidents of both parties, including Ronald Reagan. "Whoever is president over history, it's grown about the same rate," he lamented, using his arm to point upward. He said this is one of the reasons that he decided he can most effectively change the trajectory of the country by giving more to universities, think tanks and social entrepreneurs.

On the political front, Koch said he hopes to build more-diverse coalitions in the future like the one that

helped shepherd the First Step Act into law in December. His team worked with liberals like Van Jones and groups like the ACLU. Quoting abolitionist Frederick Douglass, he said he will unite with anybody to do right and nobody to do wrong. “So that's kind of where we've ended up after the long journey and a lot of missteps,” Koch said.

He insisted that he’s earnest about wanting to help conservatives and liberals find common ground on immigration and that he can do this by not being aligned with either party. His network has already spent heavily on efforts to change the nation’s immigration laws, especially through a Latino-focused group called the Libre Initiative, which has been running ads this year to push Congress to grant permanent protections for “dreamers,” the undocumented immigrants brought into the country as children. “There's still hope for immigration reform,” Koch said on Monday.

This week, the Libre Initiative has been crusading against Trump’s threat to close the border. “Shutting down the border would hurt millions of people, and it would also increase pressure for unlawful immigration, as people who can no longer cross legally will be incentivized to cross in violation of our laws,” said Libre President Daniel Garza. “That would put additional pressure on Customs and Border Protection and other law enforcement authorities. It would make existing

enforcement problems worse."

Koch himself said he also still wants to do more to roll back harsh sentences for drug crimes, which he believes incentivize violence and make communities less safe. "If you're selling pot or something and you know you're going to get 20 to 30 years, you run," he said. "You may get in a gunfight. Whereas if you had a reasonable penalty of some kind – if there needs to be any! – then you won't risk your life. But now we're turning a minor misdeed into draconian situations."

He has always been more of a libertarian than a conservative. His brother David, who stepped away last year from the political network that made them household names, was even the Libertarian Party's nominee for vice president in 1980.

Koch appeared onstage alongside Brian Hooks, who has become his right-hand man and chairman of the political network. "This is a sea change in the way that we look at the opportunity to engage in the political process," Hooks told a room of mega-rich philanthropists from across the ideological spectrum. "Most organizations, and certainly we did for a number of years, look at politics as a partisan opportunity, right? You bet on the team that's closest to what you want to accomplish, and then you try to work with them to get things done. A couple of years ago, we looked at that and

said, while that's gotten some things done, it’s not accomplishing nearly enough for the country, and it’s having all sorts of negative consequences in terms of alienation and polarization. … We said we can do better than that.”

What could happen if Trump closes the U.S.-Mexico border

THE LATEST ON THE IMMIGRATION WARS:

-- Senior White House officials are exploring ways to exempt commercial trade from Trump’s threat to shut

down the U.S. border with Mexico, but business groups express skepticism that any plan might work in a way that limits potential problems. Damian Paletta and Josh Dawsey report: "In brief remarks, Trump on Tuesday again threatened to close the border but would not definitively say whether he would do so, and he has not divulged his plans even to some of his closest aides. But the White House is bracing for the possibility and internal planning has reached an advanced stage. Trump plans to visit the Mexico border in California on Friday. … A senior White House official said Trump has been bombarded with a number of advisers warning against closing the border and that the current plan is not to close it during his visit."

-- Prices for Mexican Hass avocados spiked 34 percent, the most in a decade, because of Trump's saber rattling. Analysts expect prices to keep rising each time Trump reiterates the threat, per Bloomberg News.

-- The United States is on pace to accept one of the lowest numbers of refugees on record under sweeping restrictions imposed by the Trump administration. Carol Morello reports: "State Department figures show that 12,151 refugees arrived in the United States as of March 31, six months into the fiscal year that began Oct. 1. If the number of admissions continues at the same pace in the second half of the year, the total will fall 19 percent below the historically low ceiling of 30,000

set by Trump. The United States is now in the third year of an overall slowdown in refugee numbers, despite a continuing crisis. Worldwide, 68 million people have been forcibly displaced, and more than 25 million are refugees. … Compared with 2016, the number of refugees coming to the United States is down 71 percent.”

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WHILE YOU WERE SLEEPING:

Lori Lightfoot speaks during a forum at the University of Chicago. (Kamil Krzaczynski/AFP/Getty Images)

-- Lori Lightfoot won the runoff to become Chicago's first black female mayor. She'll also be the city's first

openly gay mayor. Mark Guarino and Mark Berman report: “Her commanding victory capped a grueling campaign that saw Lightfoot ... defeat more than a dozen challengers en route to winning her first elected office. … She defeated Toni Preckwinkle, president of the Cook County Board of Commissioners, in a contest fraught with historic meaning, given that it featured two black women vying to succeed outgoing Mayor Rahm Emanuel. ... Lightfoot campaigned on promises of change as she sought to defeat Preckwinkle, a veteran elected official.”

-- Also last night, a Democrat won a special election to flip a Pennsylvania State Senate seat in a district that Trump carried in 2016. The victory of Pam Iovino, a Navy veteran, underscores the challenges facing Trump in the Keystone State next year. (The Hill)

Saudi Arabia Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman confers with White House senior adviser Jared Kushner in Riyadh. (Jonathan Ernst/Reuters)

-- When the Trump administration on seven occasions authorized companies to share sensitive nuclear energy information with Saudi Arabia, it was supposed to consult with several agencies, including the independent Nuclear Regulatory Commission. The chairman of that agency testified that she did not know whether it had been consulted. Steven Mufson

reports: “NRC Chairman Kristine L. Svinicki testified before the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee on Tuesday that she did not know whether the agency had been consulted, and if so whether it had raised any concerns. At one point Sen. Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.) asked four questions in a row about the agency’s participation, pausing after each one, and Svinicki and her four fellow commissioners remained silent.”

Members of Congress are seeking additional information about the approvals, including whether any were issued by the Trump team after the assassination of Washington Post contributing columnist Jamal Khashoggi. Van Hollen said after the hearing that administration officials “appear willing to short-circuit the process to achieve their political goal of continuing to cozy up to the Saudi regime.” He added, “At the very least, it is clearly unwilling to stand up to the Saudis on human rights while at the same time bending over backwards to give the Saudis access to nuclear material and technology.”

-- A Britax jogger stroller faced a recall after countless accidents, but then the Trump administration intervened: The company wouldn't have to remove its product from stores after all, and a lawsuit from the Consumer Product Safety Commission was dropped. Todd C. Frankel reports: “According to a review of documents by The Washington

Post and interviews with eight current and former senior agency officials, **the agency's Republican chairwoman kept Democratic commissioners in the dark about the stroller investigation and then helped end the case in court.** … The agency has historically been a leader in protecting children, passing strict limits on lead in children's toys and ending the sale of deadly drop-side cribs. Its lawsuit against Britax ended in November with a settlement, approved by a 3-to-2 commission vote reflecting the new Republican majority. In a rare written dissent, the panel's two Democrats called the settlement 'aggressively misleading' for seeking to downplay the risks to consumers."

North Carolina Republican Party Chairman Robin Hayes speaks during the party's state convention in 2017. (Mike Spencer/AP)

GET SMART FAST:

1. **Robin Hayes, the chairman of the North Carolina Republican Party and a former congressman, was indicted in a federal corruption probe.** Hayes and three others are accused of attempting to bribe North Carolina Insurance Commissioner Mike Causey, who was not charged, to get him to make

decisions favorable to the company of a donor. (Colby Itkowitz)

2. **Rep. Mark Walker (R-N.C.) has also been ensnared in the federal corruption probe.** The indictment names a “public official A,” identified by Politico as Walker, who called Causey to put in a good word about the same donor before receiving a $150,000 donation.

3. **Former House speaker Paul Ryan talked about his future in his hometown, saying that his foundation will work to combat poverty and that he plans to teach at a Midwestern university later this year.** Ryan didn't deliver a serious answer when asked whether he'll run for president in the future. (GazetteXtra)

4. **The Vatican released a 33,000-word letter from Pope Francis calling for the church to have “open doors” for women seeking “greater justice and equality.”** But the document, which was addressed to “all Christian young people,” failed to outline concrete steps the Catholic Church would take to expand opportunities for women, and it did not break new ground on the clerical abuse crisis. (Chico Harlan)

5. **Five former federal employees are suing several**

government agencies over the pre-review process for publication of accounts of their service. The process, which the employees decried as a “system of censorship,” requires former government workers to receive approval before publishing writing or speaking publicly about their service. The plaintiffs complained that the agencies, including the CIA and NSA, often requested embarrassing information to be redacted, even though it was usually already in the public domain. (Deanna Paul)

6. **YouTube executives repeatedly ignored warnings about how the video platform allowed conspiracy theories and hate speech to flourish out of fear that a crackdown could disrupt viewer “engagement.”** One former employee said that CEO Susan Wojcicki, in particular, would “never put her fingers on the scale.” (Bloomberg News)

7. **In the week before the death of rapper Nipsey Hussle, Los Angeles saw 26 other shootings and 10 murders.** Los Angeles Police Chief Michel Moore said there's been a “troubling surge” of violence in the City of Angels. (Noah Smith and Eli Rosenberg)

8. **A disabled veteran won a $250,000 settlement from the feds after park rangers arrested him over a parking space for the disabled at Sequoia**

National Park. The government settled to avoid a trial after Sgt. Dominic Esquibel said
a ranger kicked the foot that he nearly lost when serving in Afghanistan. (Alex Horton)

9. **Apple's news service gained 200,000 users in the 48 hours after it launched.** That's more users than Texture — the application that Apple bought and repackaged as Apple News Plus — ever had at its peak. (New York Times)

Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate has been a high-priority target of foreign agents. (J. David Ake/AP)

ALL THE PRESIDENT'S CLUBS:

-- A Chinese woman carrying two passports and a thumb drive containing malware gained access to the reception area of Mar-a-Lago before being arrested by the Secret Service. “The incident renews concerns about how secure the president and his advisers are during their frequent stays at his club, which stays open for its members and their guests when the president is there,” Devlin Barrett and David Fahrenthold report.

- **Yujing Zhang allegedly approached a Mar-a-Lago checkpoint on Saturday and claimed she was trying to go to the resort’s swimming pool.** The criminal complaint said Zhang was asked whether her father was a member of Mar-a-Lago. “Due to a potential language barrier issue, Mar-a-Lago believed her to be the relative of member Zhang and allowed her access onto the property,” according to the complaint.
- **Zhang repeatedly changed her story about why she was on the property once she was confronted by a receptionist and later a Secret Service agent.** “After being asked several times, Zhang finally responded that she was there for a United Nations Chinese American Association event

later in the evening," the complaint says. "The Receptionist knew this event did not exist."

- **Zhang became "verbally aggressive" once Secret Service agents took her to another location to question her.** "During the second interview of Zhang, she claimed her Chinese friend 'Charles' told her to travel from Shanghai, China to Palm Beach, Florida, to attend this event and attempt to speak with a member of the President's family about Chinese and American foreign economic relations. Agents were unable to obtain any information more specifically identifying Zhang's purported contact, 'Charles,'" the complaint said.
- **A search of her belongings uncovered four cellphones, a laptop, a hard drive and a thumb drive containing "malicious malware."** She's been charged with making false statements to a federal law enforcement officer and entering a restricted area.

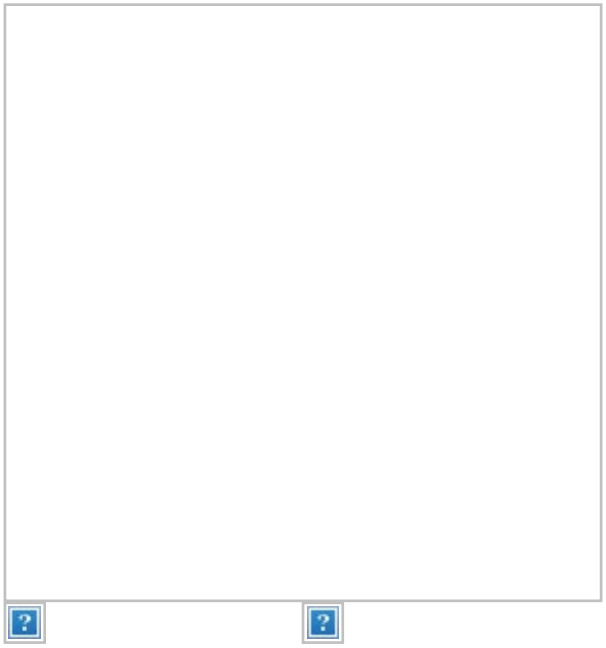
-- The Secret Service threw the Trump Organization under the bus, noting that its agents are not responsible for determining who is welcome at the president's private club. "This is the responsibility of the host entity," the agency said in a statement.

-- The woman was apparently trying to get access to an event publicized on the social media page of Cindy Yang, the former owner of the massage parlor

where Bob Kraft allegedly solicited prostitution who has been accused of trying to sell access to Trump and his family. (Miami Herald)

-- The Trump Organization paid $36,200 in delinquent property taxes on its California golf course after The Post pointed out the delinquency. The president's company neglected to pay the taxes on two parcels of land, which were declared delinquent in December. The unpaid bills were covered hours after a Post reporter asked about them on Monday. (Fahrenthold and Jonathan O'Connell)

Trump, accompanied by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) and Sen. Roy Blunt (R-Mo.), arrives on Capitol Hill. (Andrew Harnik/AP)



THE REPUBLICAN AGENDA:

-- **"Trump has left his advisers and GOP lawmakers reeling from policy whiplash in recent days, cycling through new ideas on health care and immigration that underscore his continuing struggle to pursue a coherent domestic agenda in a divided Washington,"** Seung Min Kim and Erica Werner report. "Trump surprised Republicans last week with a new pledge to replace the Affordable Care Act, only to backtrack. … By late Monday night — and in subsequent comments in the Oval Office on Tuesday — Trump bowed to the political pressure by announcing he would rather vote on health care after the 2020 elections."

In at least two recent phone calls, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell "pressed Trump to listen to

those around him — his advisers, senators and political strategists — who were urging the president to reverse course on health care, according to an official familiar with the conversation. McConnell questioned why Republicans would want an intraparty fight over health care at a time when Democrats are divided on their own proposals … During a conversation Monday, the majority leader made the case that while the GOP-led Senate could pass a health-care bill endorsed by Trump, the president would not be able to support the product that would emerge from the House once Democrats got their hands on it."

-- The Senate is no longer the world's greatest deliberative body, and its erosion continues. Paul Kane reports that Democrats have barely fought back as McConnell again changed the rules of the Senate to make it easier to confirm Trump nominees, reducing the number of hours of floor debate required before a nominee can be confirmed. This signals that, in the not-so-distant future, liberal activists could push for the complete elimination of the legislative filibuster. “These liberals see abolishing the filibuster as the only way to advance policies such as Medicare-for-all and the Green New Deal, which have drawn no interest from any Senate Republican,” Paul explains. “So under their best-case scenario in 2020, [a] Democratic president would be incapable of delivering on those promises because a Democratic House would pass big legislation, only to see

it die via GOP filibuster in the Senate ...

“The Senate’s self-proclaimed institutionalists are an ever-shrinking group that could now get around town in a single SUV, but they are alarmed nonetheless. Sen. Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii) said the chamber is heading for a reckoning about the overall role it plays in this era of hyper-partisanship ... **‘The question for us is: Shall we try to renew the old Senate or retain what remains of it, or do we need to figure out what the Senate is in the modern era? That’s one of the questions that I’ve been grappling with,’ Schatz said.”**

-- Federal Reserve Chairman Jay Powell will address House Democrats during their annual policy retreat next week. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and House Democratic Caucus Chairman Hakeem Jeffries (D-N.Y.) asked the Trump appointee to brief members on the economy, an unusual request given congressional Democrats’ strident opposition to the president’s agenda. (Mike DeBonis and Rachael Bade)

-- Trump has kept up his steady drumbeat of criticism against the Fed and Powell in particular during recent meetings. The Wall Street Journal’s Nick Timiraos and Alex Leary report: “The president blasted the Fed and [Powell] at three meetings in the past week alone, telling Republican senators, supporters and staffers that if it

wasn't for the central bank's past rate increases, economic output and stocks would be higher and the U.S. budget deficit would be rising less. … **Mr. Trump also blamed Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin for recommending Mr. Powell for the top Fed job. 'Mnuchin gave me this guy,' Mr. Trump said. Mr. Trump recalled a recent phone conversation he had with Mr. Powell ... 'I guess I'm stuck with you,' the president recalled telling Mr. Powell."**

-- Rep. Matt Gaetz (R-Fla.) said a transgender rights bill being considered by a House committee would allow Trump to declare himself the "first female president." Felicia Sonmez reports: "Gaetz, one of Trump's most vocal defenders on Capitol Hill, is known for making incendiary statements. He was speaking at a hearing on H.R. 5, the 'Equality Act,' which would prohibit discrimination against gay and transgender individuals in housing, use of public spaces, employment and other areas."

Cummings defends unleashing subpoenas over Trump security clearances

SO MANY SUBPOENAS:

-- The House Oversight and Reform Committee voted to subpoena former White House official Carl Kline, who has been accused of overturning security clearance denials from career professionals despite serious red flags about foreign influence and the possibility of blackmail. Rachael Bade reports: “The move represents one of the committee’s first compulsory

measures aimed at the administration and follows whistleblower Tricia Newbold's allegation that Trump's White House has behaved recklessly with national security."

-- Newbold said she felt humiliated by what she considers an act of retaliation from her boss. NBC News's Laura Strickler, Peter Alexander and Rich Schapiro report: "Newbold said her supervisor moved files to a shelf beyond her reach after she complained about the decision to grant security clearances over the objections of senior staffers. 'It was definitely humiliating,' said Newbold, a manager in the White House's Personnel Security Office, who has a rare form of dwarfism. 'But it didn't stop me from doing what was right.' … Newbold was later suspended without pay for two weeks for defying Kline, according to the suspension decision notice obtained by NBC News. The punishment was issued less than a week after the NBC News report about Kushner's security clearance."

-- The Oversight Committee also subpoenaed testimony and documents related to the Trump administration's move to add a citizenship question to the 2020 Census. Tara Bahrampour reports: "The 23-to-14 vote authorizes committee Chairman Elijah E. Cummings (D-Md.) to issue subpoenas for a deposition of John Gore, principal deputy assistant attorney general, and to Attorney General William P. Barr and Secretary of

Commerce Wilbur Ross for documents related to the decision. One Republican, Rep. Justin Amash (R-Mich.), voted with the Democrats. … House Democrats pressed Ross to explain why his previous sworn testimony conflicted with government records and asked whether he had lied under oath."

-- The House Judiciary Committee, meanwhile, is expected to vote along party lines today to authorize Chairman Jerry Nadler (D-N.Y.) to subpoena Barr for Bob Mueller's full report. But the panel's Democrats remain split over how aggressively to seek the report. Karoun Demirjian reports: "Nadler is not expected to turn around and issue that subpoena to Barr straightaway, giving the attorney general at least a few days to hustle the report to Capitol Hill before resorting to legal measures and a potential court battle in an attempt to force his hand. But many panel Democrats do not share Nadler's patience and want the chairman to serve Barr with a summons for the report right away. … The split in the party is the latest example of internal challenges Democratic leaders face as they attempt to strike a balance between rank-and-file members itching for a head-on fight with Trump and those worried about pursuing methods that might be considered too partisan."

-- Trump attacked Nadler in a tweet over the committee chairman's demands to see Mueller's full report. "In 1998, Rep. Jerry Nadler strongly opposed the

release of the Starr Report on Bill Clinton. No information whatsoever would or could be legally released. But with the NO COLLUSION Mueller Report, which the Dems hate, he wants it all. NOTHING WILL EVER SATISFY THEM!" Trump tweeted. Colby Itkowitz notes: "The morning tweet by Trump followed a conversation about this matter on 'Fox & Friends.' On Monday, the Washington Examiner published a piece highlighting Nadler's decades-old comments after the conclusion of the Clinton investigation and noted that they seemed to conflict with what he says today about Trump."

-- Some White House officials fear Trump is overplaying his hand by falsely and repeatedly claiming the attorney general's summary of the Mueller report's conclusions amounts to "a total and complete exoneration." New York magazine's Olivia Nuzzi reports: "White House officials and people familiar with internal events have described mood swings rippling through the administration: First came relief, in the form of smiles and tears and bottles of Champagne; then, the catharsis of 'righteous anger' … as the excitement waned, 'cooler heads' emerged in the White House with brand-new anxieties about a president inclined to inflict self-harm by taking things too far. 'There will be plenty of unfavorable things about the president in the full report, which we think will eventually come out, so let's not go overboard saying there's no wrongdoing. Let's move on,' one senior White House official [said]."

-- A majority of Americans say that Mueller's findings will not affect whether they vote for Trump next year, according to the Post-Schar School poll completed last week. While 51 percent of respondents said the probe's findings would not affect their vote, 17 percent of Americans said Mueller's report would make them more likely to vote for Trump, and 30 percent said it would make them less likely to support him. (Emily Guskin)

Trump says Stoltenberg was his pick to lead NATO

THE NEW WORLD ORDER:

-- NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg's visit to the Capitol today is a point of contention between the president and congressional Republicans, who hold diverging views over the value of the military alliance. Anne Gearan and Josh Dawsey report: "Stoltenberg held lengthy meetings with Trump at the White House on Tuesday, but only as an add-on to his invitation to address Congress on Wednesday. That invitation was issued jointly by Republicans and Democrats but was spearheaded by [McConnell]. It was seen as an effort to counter Trump's lukewarm public endorsement of NATO and his continued assertion that the United States is being taken advantage of by allies who are not paying their fair share for the security umbrella they enjoy."

-- Nearly 80 percent of Americans, including majorities of Democrats and Republicans, believe the United States' NATO membership benefits the U.S., according to a new Pew poll. But the two parties are split on whether the alliance is more important to the United States or other NATO member countries. Nearly half of Republicans say NATO is more important to other member countries, but only a quarter of Democrats say the same. (Pew Research Center)

-- Some donors to Trump's inaugural committee got ambassador nominations — but they might not meet

the basic qualifications to get approved for the job. NBC News reports: "**When Trump's pick for ambassador to the Bahamas testified before Congress to make the case for his nomination, he incorrectly stated that the island nation was part of the U.S. It is an independent country.** For ambassador to the United Arab Emirates — a job so sensitive in the tense Middle East that every previous president gave it to a career diplomat — Trump picked a wealthy real estate developer with no diplomatic experience. ... An NBC News review of those who donated to the Trump inauguration found at least 14 major contributors to its inaugural fund who were later nominees to become ambassadors, donating an average of slightly over $350,000 apiece. Though the Trump administration says the business acumen of these nominees qualifies them to represent the U.S. abroad, six of the 14 nominations have languished for months in the Republican-controlled Senate. One nomination has stalled for about two years."

-- The Islamic State's refugees are facing a humanitarian calamity in northeastern Syria as thousands of people fleeing intense fighting are flooding into an overcrowded tent camp. Erin Cunningham and Kamiran Sadoun report: "More than 73,000 people, mostly women and children, are now packed into the sprawling al-Hol camp, under the control of U.S.-backed Kurdish forces. The camp, which opened in 1991 to host Iraqi refugees from the Persian Gulf War,

was originally designed to hold barely half that number. … Last week, 31 people died on the way to the camp or shortly after arriving because of traumatic injuries and malnutrition, according to the International Rescue Committee, bringing the total number of such deaths to 217."

-- Nicolás Maduro loyalists stripped Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaidó of immunity, paving the way for his prosecution and potential arrest for supposedly violating the constitution when he declared himself the country's interim president. From the AP's Scott Smith: "A defiant Guaidó spoke publicly moments after the vote, saying he's undeterred, while knowing he runs the risk of being 'kidnapped' by the Maduro government. 'We are aware of that,' Guaido said. 'But we will not change our path.'"

-- Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's party expelled former allies who challenged him in the political scandal rocking the country. Emily Rauhala reports: "Jody Wilson-Raybould, who was Canada's first indigenous attorney general, said Tuesday Trudeau had informed her she was no longer a part of the Liberal caucus and had been stripped of the party's nomination for the upcoming election to keep her seat in Parliament. Minutes later, Trudeau confirmed the news, as well as the expulsion of former Treasury Board President Jane Philpott, who had publicly supported Wilson-Raybould."

-- Komodo Island is shutting down because people keep smuggling the dragons overseas. The decision comes days after nine men were arrested on suspicion that they were trying to sell more than 40 Komodo dragons for $35,000 each. (Michael Brice-Saddler)

How Trump and his administration talk about Puerto Rico

2020 WATCH:

-- One of Joe Biden's greatest strengths is his ability

to connect with others. The former vice president has used handshakes and hugs with both friends and strangers for years. But in the #MeToo era, his tactile politics are threatening his return. The New York Times's Sheryl Gay Stolberg and Sydney Ember report: "Now, as he considers a run for president, Mr. Biden is struggling to prevent a strength from turning into a crippling liability … So far, no prominent Democrat has suggested he not run, and the women complaining about him have not claimed sexual harassment or assault. Other women have stepped forward to say Mr. Biden's touches were welcome. But the accusations lodged against Mr. Biden have raised questions about when a 'tactile politician' crosses the line into inappropriateness. …

"**The list of women coming forward is growing. Caitlyn Caruso, a former college student and sexual assault survivor, said Mr. Biden rested his hand on her thigh — even as she squirmed in her seat to show her discomfort — and hugged her 'just a little bit too long' at an event on sexual assault at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas. She was 19.** Ms. Caruso, now 22, said she chalked up the encounter at the time to how men act, and did not say anything publicly. But she said it was particularly uncomfortable because she had just shared her own story of sexual assault and had expected Mr. Biden — an architect of the 1994 Violence Against Women Act — to understand the

importance of physical boundaries."

-- Trump mocked Biden over the allegations of inappropriate touching in a preview of the attacks the former vice president might face if he runs in 2020. Felicia Sonmez reports: "During a freewheeling speech at a fundraiser for the National Republican Congressional Committee, Trump at one point told a story about a conversation he had with a general. 'I said, 'General, give me a kiss.' I felt like Joe Biden. But I meant it,' Trump said, prompting laughter from the crowd. At another point in his remarks, Trump mentioned the 2020 White House race and said that the only Democratic candidate who is not a socialist is 'being taken care of pretty well by the socialists' — a nod to unproven claims by some Biden supporters that the recent accusations against him are being pushed by his political rivals. 'I was going to say, 'Welcome to the world, Joe. You having a good time, Joe?' Trump said."

-- Biden is not a predator, but he is out of touch, Michelle Goldberg writes in a piece for the Times that's getting widely circulated. "There are countless photos of Biden ... squeezing women, rubbing their shoulders, leaning in too close. All this was open, not furtive, presumably because it never occurred to Biden that he was doing anything untoward. I don't necessarily blame him. In the past few years, women have been calling out daily indignities that previous generations grew up quietly

tolerating: lingering hugs from a boss, embarrassing intimate questions, crude office jokes. Individually, these are small acts, and most men probably don't understand how cumulatively draining they can be. Women, after all, have only recently begun to articulate it. ... So I don't think Biden's avuncular pawing is a #MeToo story. ... But if Biden was more oblivious than predatory, his history still puts him out of step with the mores of an increasingly progressive Democratic Party. ... Biden's issues with gender, after all, go far beyond chronic handsiness. His waffling on reproductive choice troubles many feminists ... He was the chairman of the hearings on Clarence Thomas's Supreme Court nomination, where Anita Hill, who accused Thomas of sexual harassment, was demeaned and dismissed. Though Biden has expressed sorrow for how Hill was treated, he's never directly apologized to her."

-- Trump's attacks on Puerto Rico and his opposition to federal aid efforts could hurt his reelection chances in Florida. Toluse Olorunnipa and Josh Dawsey report: "Trump's attacks are likely to get the attention of thousands of Puerto Rican voters whose growing numbers in Florida could be pivotal in 2020, said Susan MacManus, a University of South Florida political scientist. 'This is a state where elections turn on less than one-half of 1 percent,' she said. 'And the largest cache of new voters is in that community. Why is he picking this fight now?'"

-- White House spokesman Hogan Gidley twice referred to Puerto Rico, which has been a U.S. territory since 1898, as "that country" during an MSNBC interview yesterday. "With all they've done in that country, they've had a systematic mismanagement of the goods and services we've sent to them," he said. "You've seen food just rotting in the ports. Their governor has done a horrible job. He's trying to make political hay in a political year, and he's trying to find someone to take the blame off of his for not having a grid and not having a good system in that country at all."

-- Trump's takeover of the GOP is almost complete as he and his lieutenants grab control of the party machinery in every state of importance in the 2020 race. The Times's Alexander Burns and Jonathan Martin report: "As Mr. Trump has prepared to embark on a difficult fight for re-election, a small but ferocious operation within his campaign has helped install loyal allies atop the most significant state parties and urged them to speak up loudly to discourage conservative criticism of Mr. Trump. The campaign has dispatched aides to state party conclaves, Republican executive committee meetings and fund-raising dinners, all with the aim of ensuring the delegates at next year's convention in Charlotte, N.C., are utterly committed to Mr. Trump."

-- In an op-ed for The Post, Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-

Mass.) writes that it's time to overhaul America's laws to make sure corporate executives face jail time for overseeing scams, and also proposes a law to expand criminal liability to negligent corporate executives: "Too often, prosecutors don't even try to hold top executives criminally accountable. They claim it's too hard to prove that the people at the top knew about the corporate misconduct. This culture of complicity warps the incentives for corporate leaders. The message to executives? So long as you bury your head in the sand, you can keep collecting fat bonuses without risk of facing criminal liability. … It doesn't have to be this way."

-- Sen. Kamala Harris (D-Calif.) will introduce a bill today to allow "dreamers" to work in Congress. HuffPost's Sarah Ruiz-Grossman reports: "Even though the roughly 700,000 participants in the program are allowed to legally work, they are barred from paid roles in Congress. So-called Dreamers can still intern on Capitol Hill — they just can't get paid for it. … The new 'American Dream Employment Act' would amend the current appropriations law to include DACA recipients as a category of people eligible for paid employment on Capitol Hill."

-- House Democratic leaders seemingly have no plans to roll back a new policy aimed at protecting incumbents from potential primary challengers. Mike DeBonis and Rachael Bade report: "The message has

been delivered in public and in private about the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee's prohibition on vendors working with candidates who challenge sitting lawmakers. 'I'm for winning the House for the Democrats,' House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) said … The defiance comes amid a direct challenge from Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.), who told her 3.8 million Twitter followers Saturday — a day before a key end-of-quarter fundraising deadline — to 'pause your donations' to the DCCC in protest and instead donate directly to select Democratic incumbents."

-- The DNC announced the second presidential primary debate will be held in Detroit on July 30 and 31. The debate will be hosted by CNN and take place over two days to accommodate the large number of candidates. The DNC will choose at random which candidates debate on which day. (CNN)

-- CNN announced five more televised town halls. Erin Burnett will interview Kirsten Gillibrand on April 9, Wolf Blitzer has Jay Inslee on April 10, and Don Lemon questions Julián Castro on April 11. All three will be at 10 p.m. Eastern time. Dana Bash was assigned to moderate the town hall with spiritual guru Marianne Williamson on April 14 at 7 p.m., and Ana Cabrera questions Andrew Yang at 8 that night. (CNN)

SOCIAL MEDIA SPEED READ:

At last night's NRCC dinner, Trump said he was worried about his comments leaking. It was open to the press and carried live on television:

He also falsely claimed that his father was born in Germany:

A Post reporter followed up with some Trump history:

The Post's Fact Checker columnist reacted to Trump's planned visit to the southern border:

Politico's Capitol bureau chief flagged the latest indicator of the collapse of civility in Congress:

Sen. John Cornyn (R-Tex.) had a bit of a pessimistic outlook when talking to reporters:

Sen. Kamala Harris (D-Calif.) had a very concise answer when a voter asked what could fix anti-intellectualism in America:

Meghan McCain defended Joe Biden amid accusations of inappropriate interactions with women:

Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.) pushed back against a Fox News host's insult:

She also spoke in favor of Chelsea Manning:

George H.W. Bush's presidential library received a name change:

As the president continues pushing against aid for Puerto Rico, a Post reporter asked a geography question:

And Prince Harry and Meghan Markle launched a joint Instagram account as they prepare for the birth of their first child:

GOOD READS:

-- New York Times, "How Rupert Murdoch's Empire of Influence Remade the World," by Jonathan Mahler and Jim Rutenberg: "Few private citizens have ever been more central to the state of world affairs than [Rupert Murdoch]. As the head of a sprawling global media empire, he commanded multiple television networks, a global news service, a major publishing house and a Hollywood movie studio. His newspapers and television networks had been instrumental in

amplifying the nativist revolt that was reshaping governments not just in the United States but also across the planet. His 24-hour news-and-opinion network, the Fox News Channel, had by then fused with President Trump and his base of hard-core supporters, giving Murdoch an unparalleled degree of influence over the world's most powerful democracy. In Britain, his London-based tabloid, The Sun, had recently led the historic Brexit crusade to drive the country out of the European Union — and, in the chaos that ensued, helped deliver Theresa May to 10 Downing Street."

-- WorldNetDaily, the website that has been credited with supercharging the birther conspiracy against Barack Obama, is facing an existential crisis that many have blamed on the site's founder, Joseph Farah. Manuel Roig-Franzia details the problems plaguing the website, which attracted millions of visitors a day at the height of the birther conspiracy:

- **Authors who worked with WND's struggling publishing arm complain that the company has not honored their contracts.** Many of the authors, including former Republican senator Tom Coburn of Oklahoma, said they did not receive royalties owed to them. Others claimed they paid thousands to have their books published but did not receive audio versions of their works as promised.
- **Farah claimed last year that WND received**

hundreds of thousands of dollars in contributions but went on to lay off many employees and cancel deals with contractors.

- **Farah and his wife, Elizabeth, who co-founded WND, have faced allegations of misusing the site's funds.** One internal member raised concerns about Elizabeth's use of a company credit card at a wine shop, a clothing store and a cosmetics seller.
- **Farah has blamed the website's decline on tech giants colluding to suppress the traffic of conservative sites.** "There has never been a force like the combined power of Google, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Amazon and Apple in the world before — at least not since the Tower of Babel," Farah wrote in a column earlier this year. "I'm talking about real 'collusion' — and having nothing to do with Russia."
- **A Trump administration connection: Farah's daughter Alyssa, who now serves as Vice President Pence's press secretary, briefly wrote for WND in 2013 and 2014.**

-- "Justice for the Lyon Sisters," by Mark Bowden: "For decades, the disappearance of Sheila and Kate Lyon wasn't just an enduring mystery; it was an unhealed regional trauma. On a March day in 1975, the sisters — daughters of a well-known Washington radio personality — had gone to Wheaton Plaza, a suburban Maryland shopping mall, on an innocent outing, and then vanished.

… I was a green 23-year-old reporter with the Baltimore News-American when the story broke. My job was to show up in the newsroom at 4 a.m. and phone every police barracks in the state, asking whether anything interesting had happened overnight. … As the decades passed I wrote thousands more stories, big ones and small ones. … To me, the Lyon story was sad and beyond understanding. Few haunted me as this one did."

HOT ON THE LEFT:

"Trump wrongly claims his dad was born in Germany — for the third time," from Aaron Blake: "Of all the odd, counterfactual and conspiratorial claims President Trump has made over the past four years or so, this one may take the cake: He said Tuesday that his father was born in Germany, even though he wasn't. It is

HOT ON THE RIGHT:

"'The View' stars Meghan McCain, Joy Behar clash over presidential candidates, socialism," from Fox News: "Things got a little tense on Tuesday's 'The View.' During a discussion about Democratic presidential hopeful Pete Buttigieg, the gay mayor of South Bend, Ind., and his recent rise in popularity, Meghan

at least the third time he has said this. ‘My father is German — was German,’ Trump said. ‘Born in a very wonderful place in Germany, so I have a great feeling for Germany.’ This is not true. Fred Trump is of German descent, and his father was a German immigrant. But Fred Trump was born in New York. … Trump was perhaps using the claim to express solidarity with the man he was sitting next to Tuesday at the White House, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg.”

McCain referred to a recent NBC/Wall Street Journal poll suggesting many Americans would be okay with a homosexual president. The same poll, McCain pointed out, found only 25 percent would approve of having a socialist as president. … McCain's liberal co-host Joy Behar then interjected that voters will ‘come around’ on socialism once they get a better understanding of what it is - and the conversation got heated. ‘People are smart,’ McCain said, to which Behar shot back: ‘So am I.’”

DAYBOOK:

Trump will have a briefing and dinner with senior military leaders.

Pence will participate in Congress's joint session with the NATO chief before meeting the president for the military briefing.

QUOTE OF THE DAY:

"Just pretend you have a cold and I have a cold."
— Nancy Pelosi's advice to Joe Biden on how he can respect women's personal space. (AP)

NEWS YOU CAN USE IF YOU LIVE IN D.C.:

-- The day might start with a bit of a cool breeze, but it will warm up. The Capital Weather Gang forecasts: "After the annoyingly cool start to the week, we'll string together a couple of much more springlike days today and tomorrow. Shower chances return by Friday when we're cloudy and briefly cooler before a brighter and warmer weekend."

-- The Nationals fell to the Phillies 8-2 in Bryce

Harper's dramatic return to D.C. (Jesse Dougherty)

-- Two months after a blackface photo kicked off a round of revelations about Virginia's top three Democratic leaders, the scandals engulfing Gov. Ralph Northam's administration appear to have gone "poof," as one constituent put it. From the New York Times's Campbell Robertson: "Some say the whole mess was so exhausting and embarrassing that by the time the legislature adjourned on Feb. 24, the outrage had burned itself out. Others point to polls that showed Virginia voters were considerably less hungry for resignations than their representatives were. Some political observers mused about more fundamental changes to the life span of scandal, describing [Trump's] approach to bad press as if it were a revolutionary medical breakthrough. … For the Democrats, perhaps above all, there are the blunt political realities. Whatever may happen in the 2021 election for governor, every seat in the Republican-controlled Virginia General Assembly will be up this November, and Democrats have a chance to take back power in at least one chamber of the legislature."

-- "Riding it out is now a tried-and-true, crash-dummy-tested strategy," Paul Farhi writes of the Virginia leaders, as well as "Empire" actor Jussie Smollett and Fox News host Tucker Carlson. "The calculation is that one's critics — and whatever fraction of the public has become engaged by those critics — will soon tire and

move on, presumably to the next outrageous thing. In the meantime, the smoke surrounding the outrage will dissipate, leaving behind merely a hazy, indistinct cloud. A scandalized public figure becomes ‘that person who was involved in some kind of thing’ a while ago.”

-- Metro has put its headquarters office in the Judiciary Square area on the market. The transit authority is relocating most of its operations to a new office near L’Enfant Plaza, citing complaints that the current headquarters is “inefficient” and out of compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act. (Paul Duggan)

VIDEOS OF THE DAY:

Trump stumbled over his words while speaking to reporters in the Oval Office:

Stephen Colbert reacted swiftly to Trump's words:

He also envisioned a world in which the U.S. runs out of avocados:

A former pastor of the Relentless Church in South Carolina appeared to threaten the Greenville News after the newspaper ran unflattering reports about the church's new leaders:

'I cut people': Church pastor threatens local paper

And a video of a 12-year-old boy in Michigan filling potholes to protect his mother’s and grandmother's cars went viral:

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